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# Editor's Words

by Dr Irwin Clement A. Chung Wei Hoong, MCFP(S), Editor (Team B)

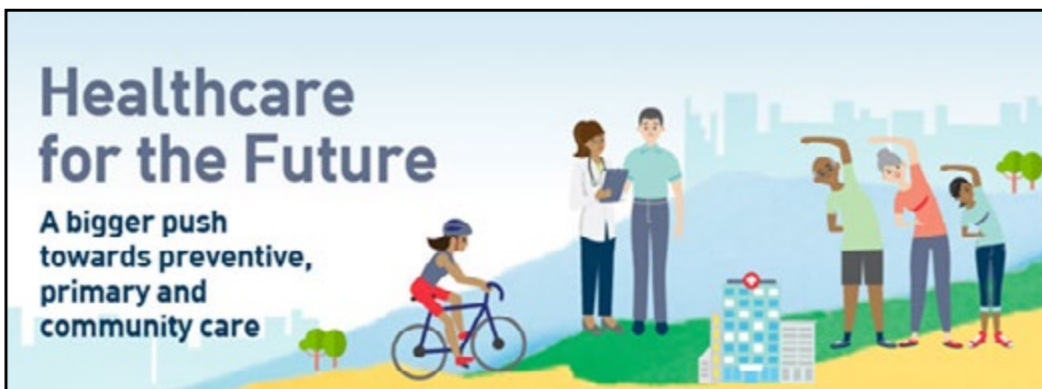
They say that weather can affect one's mood. After a short welcome relief of unseasonably lower temperatures, plenty of shade and the occasional inundation, the weatherman predicted a warmer and drier spell as we enter the month of June. Needless to say, I am not a summer person, and the main grouse I have with living in the tropics is just that – the tropical heat. What is more depressing is the fact that the deadline for writing this note is coming dreadfully close, and I am dry as a bone as far as inspiration is concerned.

I can just see the whole editorial and publication team glaring at me with unforgiving eyes, as I singlehandedly hold up everyone's timeline and all they can do is wistfully watch their key performance indicator wither away into the red. Ah! That dreaded "KPI"... Now I have an idea, hot and dry weather notwithstanding.

At a recent management retreat (or as my boss aptly corrects – "advance"), the facilitator encouraged us to throw out that "bad word". KPI connotes at best a measurement, and at worst an operational target. In strategic talk, it becomes a "burden" and really narrows our ability to think big, be wild and aim high. That resonated. How often are we as both organisations and individuals

so consumed by the effort to "hit our KPIs" that we lose track of the higher purpose those KPIs are trying to reflect? And more often than not, KPIs are proxy measures that in themselves only aim to reflect somewhat the loftier corporate goals that they serve, and are neither means nor ends in themselves. The result of which is that we lose sight of the big picture and mindlessly chase meaningless data.

It's like the national consumption with education. We know that Singapore has a laudable education system with opportunity aplenty for most children who go through mainstream schooling. We know that exams exist as penultimate checkpoints for measuring a learner's acquisition, retention and application (hopefully not just regurgitation) of knowledge. But notwithstanding this enlightened perspective, we still subconsciously extrapolate performance in an exam to the charting of one's course in life and a defining judgement of a child's future (bright as the summer sun or bleak like a wintry storm, to borrow some meteorological metaphor). We must compare our child's achievements (or lack thereof) with that of our neighbour's kid, and what easier way than with school grades (or schools, for that matter)?



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UPDATE IN ASTHMA MANAGEMENT

One of the Ministry's "Beyonds" mentioned in this year's budget release is "Beyond Quality to Value". No doubt, it pertains largely to the need to not just do better or give more but to add more value. This could range from questions on cost of care to appropriateness of intervention. More is not necessarily better, and better not necessarily mean spending or doing more. Of what value is a particular clinical decision to an individual patient? Analogously, of what value is a particular system of care to the country?

We have primary care once again at the crossroads of reckoning. In this sea of international change that is compelling many economies to balance their books. Closer to home (in these blistering tropics), evolving demographics, disease patterns and socio-economic re-alignments are also driving the need to rethink how we care for our population. As far as caring for the masses is concerned, we are reminded time and again that a strong general practice in its various forms form the bedrock to good population health outcomes. And outcome is not just a number game.

What is health care that delivers good value? Hopefully the articles in this issue will present perspectives for our consideration. As we advance into the next era of healthcare, perhaps we should learn to sweat less over KPIs but strive to get ahead of the curve in discerning what matters more in delivering on good healthcare outcomes. Else as much as KPI diminishes the value of what it should actually indicate, it also becomes no more than a performance (which we affectionately term colloquially as 'wayang').

Oh, great! No need for the rain already. I have an editorial to submit.

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